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SUBJECT: WEST DARFUR - INTERAGENCY COOPERATION TO CURTAIL ALCOHOL PRODUCTION IMPROVES IDP PROTECTION

Summary

¶1. Strict enforcement of a new policy designed to curtail the illegal production, sale, and consumption of alcohol in Riyad camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs), near El Geneina, West Darfur, resulted in an 80 percent reduction in alcohol production and a decline in the number of protection incidents recorded at the camp. An interagency group comprising the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS), the international non-government organization (NGO) camp coordinator, Government of National Unity (GNU) police, and community leaders jointly assessed the problem and devised an effective policy that limited the production and sale of alcohol by threatening to evict individuals engaged in these activities inside the camp. Frequent patrons of illegal alcohol establishments included armed security personnel who, when intoxicated, became belligerent and abusive, threatening the safety of camp residents. Furthermore, the illicit alcohol trade contributed to the development of criminal behavior that also threatened the public safety of the camp's vulnerable IDP residents. Notably, the successful restriction of the camp's alcohol trade was achieved without evicting any camp residents. End Summary.

Illegal Alcohol Trade Destabilizes an IDP Community

¶12. The production, sale, and consumption of alcohol in northern Sudan are prohibited by law. Individuals who fail to comply with this law can be imprisoned for up to two years. Despite the prohibition against alcohol in Darfur, strong demand has created a viable black market for the production and sale of alcohol. Locally made alcohol is available for sale in towns and cities, as well as in several large IDP camps throughout Darfur.

¶13. In January 2006, UNHCR and several NGOs working in West Darfur became concerned about an apparent rise in the number of violent incidents at Riyad IDP camp near El Geneina, West Darfur. UNHCR and NGOs jointly analyzed

protection incident reports from the camp. The investigation revealed that a majority of protection incidents -- including nightly weapon discharges, physical assaults, shootings, harassment, home invasion, and sexual assault of women by intoxicated, uniformed, and armed men -- involved alcohol as a root cause. The assessment team also found evidence indicating that several sheikhs, or local community leaders, were profiting from the illicit alcohol trade and obstructing attempts to curb the production, sale, and consumption of alcohol.

¶4. After conducting further research and consulting with Riyad camp community leaders, the interagency group concluded that a significant increase in local alcohol production and consumption towards the end of 2005 destabilized Riyad camp's vulnerable IDP community. The group's research indicated that more than 40 camp residents were producing and supplying alcohol to an active market with alcohol available 24 hours a day. However, the majority of alcohol producers who had established illicit businesses in Riyad camp were women from nearby El Geneina rather than Riyad's IDP camp residents. The group expressed particular concern over the large number of uniformed, armed personnel found to patronize these illegal establishments. The majority of the reported protection incidents occurred at night when joint patrols are not conducted by AMIS Civilian Police and GNU police. (Note: International agencies are prevented from working in the camp at night due to the government-imposed curfew. End note.)

¶5. Riyad camp is located directly adjacent to El Geneina, West Darfur's state capital. The illicit alcohol trade which developed as a result of this close

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proximity also spawned the development of a "red light" district in the camp that was frequented by both IDP and town residents. Solicitation of prostitutes by armed, uniformed personnel threatened the safety and wellbeing of the camp's IDP population. The interagency group was also concerned by numerous destabilizing behaviors associated with the illicit alcohol industry, including gambling, smuggling, gun-running, and the formation of gangs, possibly through forced recruitment of local youth.

Interagency Cooperation to Solve the Alcohol Problem

¶6. Selling alcohol is a lucrative proposition. The interagency group initially considered increasing livelihood programs to serve as alternatives to alcohol production. However, as the income generation potential of the proposed livelihood interventions did not compare favorably with that of alcohol production, the programs were deemed unattractive substitutes. Since the research indicated that the major alcohol suppliers originated from El Geneina, the group concluded that IDP livelihood programs alone would ultimately fail to address the root cause of the problem. The group did not fully investigate solutions designed to limit demand for alcohol in Riyad camp.

¶7. Though the camp's residents wanted to bring an end to the production, sale, and consumption of alcohol in their community, they were prevented from taking action due to fear of retaliation from powerful sheikhs who profited from the illicit trade. Community leaders wanting to halt alcohol production requested assistance from local police. Many NGOs working in the camp were initially reluctant to involve GNU police in any alcohol interdiction effort. However, UNHCR viewed the problem as an opportunity to engage the GNU police in an effort

to strengthen community law enforcement and build trust between police and the IDP community.

¶8. The alcohol policy eventually developed by the interagency group included both enforcement and livelihood substitution measures. Issued in early March through an information campaign involving community leaders, women's committees, GNU police, UNHCR, AMIS, and the NGO camp coordinator, the alcohol policy declared that individuals producing alcohol in the camp had one week to cease production activities. If producers failed to comply, authorities threatened to confiscate and destroy their equipment and evict them from the camp. GNU police concurred with the importance of the alcohol policy and agreed that no one would be arrested in furtherance of the alcohol interdiction policy.

Positive Results

¶9. Since the policy came into force in mid-March, the interagency group estimates that 75 to 80 percent of Riyad's illicit alcohol stills have ceased production. Though the group estimates that up to eight stills remain operational, local alcohol production occurs on a much smaller scale. Producers quickly adapted to enforcement measures by brewing and selling alcohol early in the morning, between 0300 to 0600 hours when the camp curfew remains in effect.

¶10. According to the interagency group and Riyad's IDP community representatives, the policy resulted in a significant decrease in the number of protection incidents in the camp over the 10 weeks since the alcohol policy has been enforced. Moreover, protection incidents that have been reported in recent weeks are less violent in nature. Gunshots, which had been routinely heard at night, no longer occur. An examination of the March and April protection reports clearly reflects this improvement.

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¶11. Two GNU police monitoring missions have discovered and destroyed six stills since the end of the grace period for voluntary compliance. Other materials used in the distilling process such as plastic buckets, metal pots, terra cotta pots, and glass jars have been either confiscated or destroyed. UNHCR, the NGO camp coordinator, and AMIS Civilian Police witnessed these GNU police operations and reported that they were conducted in a professional and restrained manner. (Note: While commendable that GNU police are contributing to improving public safety in Riyad camp, GNU police actions in other IDP camps in Darfur and in the Khartoum vicinity have prompted widespread reports of human rights violations. End Note.)

¶12. To date, authorities have not arrested or evicted individuals found culpable of alcohol production. The interagency group maintains that if alcohol production expands beyond current levels and protection incidents once again increase, graduated enforcement involving harsher consequences will be applied. Such measures may include individual arrests and destruction of shelters, particularly if producers are found to be residents of El Geneina profiting from the illicit sale of alcohol in the camp.

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